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Chairman: Mr. Maertens (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Belgium)

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In the absence of Mr. Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon), Mr. Maertens (Belgium), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 105: Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (*continued*) (A/58/172 and A/58/204)

Agenda item 106: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*) (A/58/3, A/58/61-E/2003/5, A/58/67-E/2003/49, A/58/79, A/58/153, A/58/159, A/58/229 and A/C.3/58/L.2)

Agenda item 107: Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing (*continued*) (A/58/160)

1. **Mr. Rahman** (Malaysia) said that, despite the goals set at the World Summit for Social Development and their subsequent review, there remained a plethora of social problems, especially poverty and hunger, which had not only not abated, but had sometimes escalated. In the light of the Secretary-General's assertion that, even if developing countries were to adopt sound policies and maximize their use of domestic resources, an additional annual $50 billion in aid would be needed to attain the Millennium Development Goals, he called on the developed countries to fulfil their commitment to meet their ODA obligations so that the developing countries could endeavour to meet their targets and their own obligations connected with the objectives set by the World Summit, in a spirit of social justice and equity.

2. His Government subscribed to the argument, highlighted in the report on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit (A/58/172), that social progress could not be achieved under unstable economic conditions, economic development being a key ingredient of social development. Efforts to promote social development must be an integral part of national development agendas. Convinced that each country had the primary responsibility for and ownership of its economic and social development, Malaysia had always emphasized the concept of development as a major feature of its national development programme, and its social integration policies sought to bring the disenfranchised into the mainstream of economic and social planning. To that end, there was need of greater cooperation among national agencies, international and regional organizations and civil society as a whole.

3. With a large youth population, Malaysia assigned priority to youth programmes, including the 1997 overhaul of the National Youth Policy with a view to shaping a resilient youth community that could contribute to nation-building, face the challenges of a fast-developing country and participate in humanitarian projects. His country also continued to accord priority to family development programmes that would strengthen the institution of the family in accordance with each society's cultural values, fostering cross-generation family solidarity. In the modern lifestyle in which most family members worked outside the home, Malaysia had established community-based day-care centres for the aged and provided opportunities for older people to retrain, work or study in order to cultivate their independence, self-worth and dignity.

4. Policies and programmes for improving the quality of life and integrating the disabled included the Disabled Persons Act, which protected their rights, and a nationwide web site and media assistance in raising awareness of related issues. Education for disabled persons was also guaranteed through compulsory education accompanied by the necessary facilities, which ensured that disabled children completed full primary education by age 14.

5. **Ms. Al-Qahtani** (United Arab Emirates) said that, owing to the inadequate implementation of the recommendations and outcomes of United Nations summits and conferences, half the world's population in the developing countries now lived in dire economic and social conditions. Convinced that social development could not be achieved without economic development, political stability and consolidated security in those countries, her country reaffirmed the need for prompt implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, without selectivity or separation of social-development requirements from other requirements, including more chances for those countries to participate in the international market through technology transfer and strengthened human capacities.

6. Her country, among the first 50 to attain a high level of human development, had done so by dint of national development policies designed to achieve social justice and security, societal development, family welfare, protection of children's rights, respect

for human rights, human-resource development and a higher standard of living for all citizens, providing free universal education and medical care. The Government had also implemented measures for ensuring a dignified life for all social sectors. It had also established a national training centre that would prepare young people for the global employment market.

7. The Government had paid great attention to promoting the family, which was the main foundation of society, and had enacted family-protection regulations, crowned by a presidential decree. It was also considering legislation that would cover all maternity and family aspects and had participated in numerous international and regional family-related forums. Her Government believed in the right of disabled persons and the elderly to personal dignity and had created centres for the care and rehabilitation of persons with special needs to enable them to continue their education and find suitable jobs. In accordance with Islamic values and traditions, it had never neglected the elderly and provided them with special centres.

8. The authorities attached great importance to promoting social development both in and outside the country and had acceded to bilateral and regional treaties in that field. Her country had made loans and grants to many disaster-stricken countries, in particular, on the initiative of the First Lady, a donation of $0.5 million. She hoped the Committee's deliberations would succeed in defining the most effective means of creating a "society for all".

9. **Ms. Kang** Kyung-wha (Republic of Korea) said her delegation particularly welcomed the thematic presentation in the Report on the World Social Situation, 2003 (A/58/153), focusing as it did on social vulnerability and providing a fresh perspective for her country's efforts to achieve the well-being of all members of society. Welcoming the recommendations contained in the report on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development (A/58/172), she fully supported the emphasis placed on coherence and integration of social and economic policies in achieving development goals. Her country's development experience attested to the need for integrated social and economic policy if development was to be sustainable. The Commission for Social Development, of which her country was an active member, had generated useful ideas on the issues and should continue to address that difficult topic.

10. On the threshold of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, it must be recognized that the family was the basic unit of society and must continue to play a central role in social development. However, it continued to undergo profound changes in line with societal changes and the dictates of the times, currently accelerated by globalization. In her country the archetype of the extended three-generation family under one roof was no more, and the concept of the young providing for the old had lost ground at both ends, a phenomenon all the more significant since South Korea was an ageing country. The authorities were actively promoting policies for integrating the elderly into the social mainstream.

11. Her delegation welcomed the Secretariat's road map for implementing the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its emphasis on gender mainstreaming and hoped that its recommendations would be built upon during the current session in a manner that inspired everyone to take prompt action. Her Government was already focusing on expanding the economic participation of the elderly, starting with plans to create 300,000 suitable jobs in 2004, in parallel with the strengthening of traditional welfare provisions, including the expansion of geriatric hospital care and almost trebling total spending in that area.

12. **Ms. Stažnik** (Croatia) said that, in today's globalized world, complex issues of social development needed to be tackled through coherent, integrated policies involving all social sectors and should be a shared responsibility among all States, with solid United Nations support, in a framework of enhanced cooperation and coordination among its agencies. Her delegation welcomed the report contained in document A/58/172 and reaffirmed its commitment to the principles set forth in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and to the Millennium Development Goals. In pursuit of those principles, her Government had launched an array of social and economic reforms for fostering employment growth and social well-being, such as effective implementation of its National Strategy for the Eradication of Poverty and Social Exclusion and the creation of social partnerships that could put human resources in the limelight and ensure that education and science played a central role in the quest for social progress.

13. Given her Government's conviction that only on the basis of a rights-based, participatory approach in which the family unit had an important role to play, it

supported family-oriented policies and recommended that related issues should be mainstreamed into the work of the United Nations family. In that connection, the National Committee for the Observance of the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family had been established to coordinate activities for promoting the rights of each member of the family, with special attention to the rights of children, women and the elderly. The Committee's 2002 National Family Policy defined changes in family structure resulting from war and demographic recession and comprised strategies for creating a family-friendly environment and strengthening democratic family relations, gender equality and spousal partnership.

14. Where persons with disabilities were concerned, Croatia stressed the importance of ensuring their full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and had recently adopted a national strategy on their behalf, which envisaged creating the post of ombudsperson and an office for persons with disabilities so as to promote their full participation in society. In that connection, it welcomed the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities.

15. By the same token, in order to motivate young people to become active members of society and participate in decision-making, her Government encouraged youth employment by means of special projects, within the Croatian Employment Service, for acting as a link between the labour market and skilled professionals, providing financial support to the unemployed and career guidance and facilitating job creation by participating in local development initiatives. In that connection, Croatia supported the effective implementation of and follow-up to the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond and looked forward to working closely with other delegations on those issues.

16. **Mr. Siv** (United States of America) said that, although increased longevity was a great success story, it also posed serious challenges for every Member State's response to the reality of an ageing population. The United States, in its commitment to facilitate longer and better lives for its inhabitants, recognized that it involved overhauling its pension and retirement systems, including its social security system, which was unsustainable in its current form. His country, was not only working to harness market forces and Government stewardship in order to strengthen those systems and health-care schemes for the elderly, but it also assisted other countries in developing strategies that balanced general welfare with the needs of the elderly and was committed to the realization of the goals of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

17. Persons with disabilities had too long been targets of discrimination. Equality and dignity having been reaffirmed as the inherent right of all human beings, the current attention to such persons demonstrated a desire to see them fully integrated into society. The United States had long worked to promote the rights of the disabled and had a comprehensive set of regulations and enforcement mechanisms ensuring real, observable improvement in their lives, which had been implemented by local governments and private business, with enforcement from the Federal Government. The authorities must provide leadership by taking action at home and must discuss the issue in international forums. His country was willing to share its experiences with other States in the elaboration of an international convention in that field.

18. The humanitarian crisis caused by trafficking in persons, of which children were often the victims, underscored the need to halt the breakdown of the family — the cornerstone of society — which not only drove children towards violent crime and self-destructive behaviour, but had adverse consequences for society when they dropped out of school or became pregnant. Hence, the forthcoming tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family presented the ideal opportunity for States to review their practices in that regard and renew their commitment to strengthening the family.

19. **Mr. Fall** (Senegal) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The persistence of poverty, disease and illiteracy was a burden preventing the social development of many levels of global society from reaching its fullest expression. More than ever before, it was important to focus on the need for social harmony, particularly in the countries of the Third World, in order to eliminate poverty and social exclusion. Youth, disabled persons and the elderly were an integral part of society and must enjoy their full rights as citizens. Therefore, Senegal supported the noble objectives of the United Nations Literacy Decade 2003-2012, and had hosted the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000. Vigorous efforts were needed to prevent illiteracy from slowing the pace of development, and his Government had designed

literacy programmes specifically targeted at youth and children.

20. Persons with disabilities were vulnerable in many countries, but they had the right to social protection and equal opportunities. Senegal had undertaken initiatives to improve their quality of life and social and legal protection, raise their level of education and vocational training and facilitate their access to basic social services and employment. The family was at the heart of his Government's social policy, and the revision of the Family Code currently under way was aimed at raising the status of women within the family by bringing it into line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Youth employment was another priority for his delegation, as well. Finally, he called for the mobilization of adequate human and financial resources to implement the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

21. **Mr. Sallam** (Saudi Arabia) said that, through its development plans, his country had sought to ensure that its citizens enjoyed the social and other benefits of development, as well as the opportunity to make an effective contribution to all areas in that regard. It was also enhancing its national human resources by furthering their practical and vocational skills. Moreover, it had introduced a variety of welfare, training, rehabilitation and other programmes and projects with a view to tackling the social and economic problems which lay behind unemployment. Numerous social development centres and committees in both rural and urban areas were jointly engaged in implementing programmes for the benefit of mothers, children, including the disabled, and young people. Utmost attention had also been devoted to providing appropriate care, rehabilitation and vocational training for the disabled, as well as financial assistance for their families. Centres for the care of the disabled had been opened country-wide and two funds had been established for the purpose of developing human resources, tackling poverty and providing work opportunities.

22. Despite the enormous technological and scientific progress achieved in recent decades, the majority of the world's inhabitants continued to suffer from a wide range of problems which prevented them from achieving the social development to which they aspired and increased the social and economic disparities between the wealthy developed countries and the developing countries plagued by poverty, hunger and war. He therefore called for greater efforts to improve the mechanisms for development and remove the obstacles to progress. In such times of woe and misfortune, religious values and teachings offered the only basis for ending domination by fellow human beings and preserving human dignity in the interests of security, peace and stability.

23. **Ms. Chojnacka** (the Netherlands), speaking as a youth delegate, said that including young people in decision-making and in implementing those decisions was of increasing importance. In addition to the problems of poverty, unemployment and lack of education, the AIDS pandemic deprived many young people of their families at a young age. Moreover, young people between the ages of 15 and 25 were themselves the major group directly affected by the disease. A vast majority of youth suffered from exclusion, which meant lack of participation and access to wealth, education and jobs — in short, no hope. Since so many young people were excluded, they were experts on many of the issues that the United Nations dealt with, yet many felt that their voices were not heard in the discussion of world problems. Frustration led many young people to apathy, or even worse, to aggression and violence.

24. It was encouraging that Member States had succeeded in adopting the Millennium Development Goals, but the spirit to act on them appeared to be lacking. One reason could be that not enough people were aware of their existence, and the Millennium Development Goals campaign was thus welcome. It was also possible that the concept of "We, the peoples", which formed the very basis of the United Nations system, had not yet been fully incorporated into global ways of thinking. Many still divided the world into "us" and "them". It seemed that those divisions were becoming stronger, and youth should be actively involved in turning the tide. Not only could they contribute to a change in attitude, but they should also be involved in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. Their views should be heard and they should be employed as advisers, policy makers and field workers.

25. Meaningful youth participation must take place on terms set by youth themselves. Therefore, States should facilitate creation of national youth councils by providing financial support and giving such councils a voice. She also called upon States to use young people as policy advisers, especially concerning youth issues, and to include youth representatives in official delegations to important United Nations meetings.

26. **Mr. Chidyausiku** (Zimbabwe) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement of Botswana on behalf of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and the statement of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. While the situation in many developing countries had not changed significantly since the World Summit on Social Development, and in some cases had worsened, his Government remained committed to fulfilling the goals and objectives in the area of social development.

27. As observed in the Report on the World Social Situation 2003 (A/58/153), there was a causal relationship between such social ills as lack of education, poor health, limited access to health care and education on the one hand, and poverty, earning capacity and personal development on the other. Zimbabwe had therefore placed priority on providing basic social services, particularly education and health care, but its achievements had been eroded during the 1990s by the prescriptive policies of the Bretton Woods institutions. Its poverty reduction efforts had also been adversely affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic that had decimated the economically active segment of the population. Resources were being diverted from productive sectors to programmes for the care of people living with HIV/AIDS, including AIDS orphans. While the HIV prevalence rate in Zimbabwe had dropped from 35 per cent to 24 per cent, it remained unacceptably high, and increased assistance to fight the scourge would be welcome.

28. Social development in southern Africa had been impeded by the current food crisis, a result of two successive droughts. In a largely agricultural country such as Zimbabwe, land use and ownership had an important bearing on levels of prosperity, as well. His country had embarked on a land reform programme in order to improve the lot of the majority of its population that hitherto had been condemned to poverty. The programme was largely concluded, and had already begun to yield tangible results for many of its people. Lastly, he reiterated his Government's pledge to implement the Copenhagen Programme of Action and its willingness to forge ahead despite seemingly insurmountable hurdles.

29. **Mr. Taranda** (Belarus) said that, in a globalizing world beset with new challenges, the Organization did well to continue to prioritize social development. His delegation agreed with the Secretary-General that policy coordination and partnership as well as national responsibility were critical in that regard. It also welcomed the agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission for Social Development at its forty-first session. In particular, Belarus applauded the latter's reaffirmation of the need for renewed and effective partnerships between developed countries and developing countries as well as countries with economies in transition.

30. The social and economic development gaps between countries continued to pose a serious obstacle to sustainable development goals. The United Nations must continue to develop international standards and regulations in that regard, inter alia, to ensure equal market access for all. Sustainable development, as well as world peace, security and stability depended on it.

31. His own Government's economic policy was aimed at achieving social development through a social market economy. The policy took account of the results of international socio-economic forums and incorporated relevant social protection provisions. In the context of reforms under way in Belarus, there had been a shift towards targeted social protection and people-centred development.

32. His delegation welcomed the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities. In Belarus, there were now some 480,000 persons living with disabilities, which was why the issue of equal rights for such persons was particularly relevant. A government programme focused on the prevention of disability and the rehabilitation and integration of disabled persons in society, which required considerable resources. International technical and financial assistance would be greatly appreciated in that area.

33. Belarus planned to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family with a number of initiatives designed to advance the status and prestige of the family. The necessary legislative basis had been established at the domestic level to regulate youth employment. His delegation particularly welcomed the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network, which was in line with the development goals contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

34. Belarus, like other countries, was also faced with the prospect of an ageing population, with 35.8 per cent of the population estimated to reach 60 years of age or older by 2050. The country's social and economic policy would certainly need to be adapted to reflect such a significant demographic change. In that

connection also, the Government was also looking to improve the pension system by combining State as well as private elements. The increased international cooperation on ageing should be applauded, but successful implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing would depend on progress achieved in developing national implementation strategies. The efforts of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to provide assistance to Member States for that purpose were appreciated.

35. **Mr. Gallegos** (Ecuador) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement of Peru on behalf of the Rio Group and that of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It was impossible to achieve sustainable economic development without social development. Social protection must be seen as a productive expenditure and an investment in human capital, as spending on social protection was a determining factor in the growth of countries. Thus, coherence and integration between social policy and economic policy was imperative. Highly indebted developing countries like Ecuador faced serious limitations on their ability to create economic stability and sustainable development because of excessive external debt servicing and trade barriers to their exports. Debt service represented over 40 per cent of Ecuador's annual State budget. Without a just solution to that problem, any economic and social development policy was doomed to failure.

36. He reiterated his Government's commitment to improving the living standard of vulnerable groups like the elderly and disabled persons, and especially to protect their human rights. Ecuador had hosted a regional seminar on disability under the auspices of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Participating countries had expressed support for the elaboration of a convention concerning the rights of disabled persons that would reflect the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights.

37. **Mrs. Ahmed** (Sudan) said that much remained to be done to achieve full social development for all, which was a national responsibility requiring greater political commitment at both the national and international levels. The goal of poverty eradication had been the major outcome of the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, and official development assistance to the developing and least developed countries was crucial to achieve the target of reducing by half the proportion of poor by 2015. It was also equally important to involve those countries in making the decisions and rules applicable to them by international financial institutions, for instance, in the interest of ensuring their social development and the adoption of integrated socio-economic policies. Other issues vital to the social development of those countries included relief from the crippling burden of external debt, global economic reform, monetary stability and the ability to compete more effectively on the global market.

38. Poverty and inequality, however, would not be eradicated without improvement of the deteriorating infrastructures in African countries in particular, for which purpose international assistance was essential. Since development was an intrinsic human right, there should be no imposition of unilateral economic sanctions or penalties and the right to food and medicine should be guaranteed. Foreign occupation was also a major obstacle to social and economic development and should be brought to an end, thus enabling the inhabitants concerned to exercise sovereignty over their territory. A further imperative was that of effective international cooperation to combat endemic disease, particularly malaria, and the risks associated with AIDS.

39. She hoped that the imminent peace agreement in the Sudan would have a positive impact on the country's social development, particularly in regard to poverty reduction. Older persons in the Sudan received special attention, and she therefore welcomed the recommendations aimed at strengthening implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002. Efforts were also under way to integrate the disabled as effective members of Sudanese society, to which end a national council had been established. A national committee had similarly been set up to coordinate activities in connection with the observance of the International Year of the Family. Her Government also devoted particular attention to programmes designed to assist families in performing their social role and strengthen their position as one of the indispensable institutions of society. In conclusion, she said that the international community should make concerted efforts to abandon all narrow and self-interested attitudes in order to work for the peace, stability and well-being of the entire human race.

40. **Mr. Leigh** (United Nations Volunteers (UNV)) said that the notion that the profile and intensity of voluntary action in a society was affected by social and economic policy and required a strategic approach to ensure a favourable environment had first arisen at the World Summit on Social Development and Beyond in 2000. The Summit had recognized volunteering as a

basic vehicle by which youth, older persons, people with disabilities, families and other groups could participate in the economic and social life of societies. Lack of access to meaningful volunteer opportunities was an important feature of the exclusion faced by many social groups.

41. The International Year of Volunteers in 2001 had helped to move the volunteer agenda forward, in particular through the adoption of General Assembly resolutions 56/38 and 57/106. The first International Meeting on Volunteering and the Millennium Development Goals would take place in December in Brazil. He joined with the representative of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in expressing the hope that Governments would work together with civil society to build a stronger enabling environment for volunteering. Volunteerism was an enormous reservoir of skills, ingenuity, creativity and solidarity that could make major inroads in addressing social exclusion and poverty.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.